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New Esports Director Plans to Grow Program

Gaming allows John McDermott to pursue coaching interests, provide opportunities for students

AUGUST 30, 2022 BY CARTER DIGGS



After three years of leading the esports program at Long Island University, John McDermott has joined UM as director of Ole Miss Esports. His goals include developing a championship program and using it to build new opportunities for students. Photo by Kevin Bain/Ole Miss Digital Imaging Services

OXFORD, Miss. – The new director of **Ole Miss Esports** has big plans for the fall semester.

John McDermott, who joined the **University of Mississippi** on Aug. 15, plans to expand the program, recruit and develop student talent, and create opportunities for students to use their gaming interests in their chosen professional fields.

McDermott spent the last three years leading the esports program at Long Island University. During his time at LIU, the program grew from six students in 2019 to more than 300.

The immediate goal is to grow the esports community within Oxford and lay the foundation of a championship program, he said.

"What I like to do first is to get a gauge of what students are looking for in the program," McDermott said. "Once we do that, we try to identify a group of talented individuals here to form a baseline with while supplementing through recruiting."

William Patrick Spiars, former Ole Miss Esports president, believes McDermott is coming in at a good time to grow the program.

"(Ole Miss Esports) has given people a place to go when they don't know where they belong on campus," said the senior marketing major from Yazoo City. "The university has started to see that esports has become a prevalent thing and that we have a little bit of weight behind our community."

Founded in 2017 as a student club, Ole Miss Esports **became an official university program** in 2018. The more than 50 playing members compete nationwide in games such as Halo, Rocket League, Valorant and more. Additionally, the group hosts LanShark tournaments and puts on an annual **Esports Egg Bowl**.

Esports has grown exponentially with the advent of live streaming services. In its 2021 Global Esports and Live Streaming Market Report, **Newzoo** estimates that more than 435 million viewers tuned in during 2020. That number is projected to exceed 577 million in 2024.

The EVO 2022 tournament reported 8,049 players in attendance for the event, with peak streaming traffic on Twitch reaching more than 250,000 viewers

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OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates'

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OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve's

"This is a great example of us embracing another field that is in high demand," said Noel Wilkin, UM provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs. "It enables us to provide students with opportunities in a growing industry that is in alignment with their interests."

McDermott's experience with professional gaming dates back to high school. That was when he first got paid to produce PvE – player versus environment – on World of Warcraft.

"It was really small," he said. "But as a 17-year-old, that \$100 every three months was a big deal in my head."

In college, McDermott took a break from gaming to pursue his dream of playing, and one day coaching, college football. But after a series of injuries left him unable to return to the gridiron, he found himself pulled back into the world of gaming.

A paper he wrote on the viability of esports impressed his professors at St. John's University, which led to an opportunity to coach esports at LIU.

"I always had an interest in coaching and helping people accomplish their dreams," McDermott said. "I found that avenue through esports as well, and I feel like there's more work you can do in terms of developing the people within it."

McDermott plans to bring that focus on student development he honed at LIU to Ole Miss. At LIU, 97 percent of their esports students graduated within four years, and 85 percent found a job within a week of graduation.

Esports is an ideal professional entry point for students of any discipline, McDermott said. And he plans to let students infuse their professional aspirations into esports programming.

"For example, with journalism students, you can start in esports, build up a portfolio and resume, and transition into a more traditional news media job," he said. "That learning and developmental experience is something I'm looking forward to."

Inclusivity will be another of McDermott's priorities. The gaming field's ability to bring people together is something he finds valuable and wants to emphasize.

"You have the ability to create magical moments and work with all kinds of students," he said. "There was one day (at LIU) when a Division I runner visited the esports program and sat down to play with an international student he never would have interaction with otherwise."

That aligns with the university's continued efforts to welcome all students with varied interests, talents, passion and curiosity, Wilkin said.

"I'm really excited about the opportunities that our new, dedicated director will be able to create for students," he said. "It will enable us to offer the level of excellence and competition that students have come to expect at the University of Mississippi."

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